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The Technology Margin: Soviet Assisted by Ex-C.I.A. Agents

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 14 — The disclosure that two former American intelligence agents attempted to divert military-related technology abroad has focused attention on a problem with serious national security implications: the

Government's failure to assure that its advanced technology does not leave this country illegally.

News
Analysis

One of the inconsistencies emerging from the activities of the former agents, Edwin P. Wilson and Frank E. Terpil, is the major imbalance between the billions spent to develop sophisticated technology and the relatively limited Government resources devoted to controlling its loss to other nations, including the Soviet Union.

It has long been clear that the investment in research and development of computers, microelectronics, lasers and other advanced technology by the Defense Department and private industry is critically important to national security. American officials have said that the United States' technological edge had allowed it to stay ahead, or abreast, of the Soviet Union in military capabilities.

American Lead Held Reduced

Recently, however, the Defense Department concluded that "the Soviets have dramatically reduced the U.S. lead in virtually every important basic technology."

Some of the Russians' technological gains were obtained legally, but some were doubtless obtained illegally, according to American specialists. Nonetheless, officials in the intelligence agencies, the Customs Service and the Commerce Department, which licenses many technology exports, said that the

Government only recently assigned a high priority to investigating illegal sales of technology to unfriendly nations. They said they were beginning to put more resources into the effort.

Some officials said that the enforcement program was still understaffed. They noted that the Commerce Department had only a relative handful of investigators and inspectors, and the Customs Service had not devoted enough resources to inspect outbound shipments on a sustained basis. Reagan Administration officials said that they were uncertain how much technology, both data and equipment, was reaching the Soviet Union illegally but that they had evidence the Russians had stepped up their covert procurement activities in this country and abroad.

Agents' Maneuvers Unavailing

The Wilson-Terpil case has helped focus attention on the inadequacies in the Government's safeguards against illegal leakage.

From what is known of their activities, Mr. Wilson and Mr. Terpil were generally unsuccessful in their attempts to export technology abroad, although not primarily because of Government enforcement actions.

Both men left the Central Intelligence Agency in the 1970's and went to work for Libya to train terrorists. They are now under Federal indictment for allegedly shipping explosives to that country, with which the United States has a belligerent relationship.

According to former associates, in 1977 Mr. Wilson also tried to obtain and divert to the Soviet Union an American computer program used in electronic intelligence gathering and reconnaissance.

A former employee of the Stanford Technology Corporation, a California electronics company with which Mr. Wilson had been associated, said that

the former agent asked him to steal the computer program. The employee said he refused to do so. It is not clear whether Mr. Wilson was able to obtain the program by other means or whether it reached the Soviet Union.

Furthermore, Mr. Wilson and Mr. Terpil were said to have used their intelligence connections and knowledge in attempts to help Stanford Technology market restricted electronic warfare equipment to Middle Eastern nations in the 1970's. Mr. Wilson and Mr. Terpil had left the Central Intelligence Agency by the time they went to work for Stanford Technology. But they told company executives they still worked for the agency, and these executives concede that that was one of the reasons they were selected as salesmen.

Some senior intelligence officials, after reviewing the Wilson-Terpil case, have said it was especially striking that the flow of technology abroad was being aided by former American intelligence agents. The case is particularly dramatic, they said, but illustrates what can happen when former agents turn their expertise against the Government that trained them.

Actions of Former Agents

Many other former intelligence agents, military aides and other specialists work in the technology field in what has been described as a kind of uneasy marriage of intelligence connections and private enterprise. For example, Rauer H. Meyer, who headed the Government's Export Administration for many years and was the man most responsible for setting up the apparatus to enforce United States export laws, left the Government in 1979 and went to work as a consultant for a company that acts as a go-between for sales of high technology to the Soviet Union. The head of this company, Videlcom, based in Geneva and London, was involved

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